

American

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Iran Sanctions Enter New Phase, U.S. Official Says.....	1
Korean Nuclear Deal Offers “Modest First Step,” Secretary Clinton Says	1
Secretary Clinton, Congress Begin Debate on Foreign Affairs Budget	2
U.S. Economy Grew More than Expected in 2011.....	3
USAID Launches New Center to Promote Democracy, Human Rights	4
Syrians Facing “Murder and Starvation,” Says State’s Brimmer	5
Global Drug Panel Urges Action Before “Tipping Point” Comes.....	5
Finance Ministers Focus on Strengthening Global Economy	6
Paying the Ultimate Price for the Freedom of Information.....	7

Iran Sanctions Enter New Phase, U.S. Official Says

1 March 2012

Washington — The United States and its partners are tightening sanctions against Iran to compel it to stop its illicit nuclear program, a U.S. Treasury official says.

Under Secretary of the Treasury David Cohen said the European Union (EU), the United States and other countries are entering “a new phase in our sanction efforts” designed to reduce Iran’s revenues from oil exports and to isolate its central bank. Cohen spoke at a February 29 anti-money laundering conference in New York.

He said the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program is “increasingly dire.”

“We are leaning heavily on sanctions in our efforts to bring about a peaceful resolution to the situation,” Cohen said.

Iran says all of its nuclear activities are peaceful.

Cohen said that until Iran commits to “sustained” negotiations over its international nonproliferation obligations, Washington will have “no choice but to continue to increase the pressure on Tehran, including by imposing ever more powerful sanctions.”

Under a law that will be phased in over several months, Cohen said, foreign banks and companies risk losing access to U.S. financial institutions if they engage in certain transactions, including those related to petroleum purchases, with Iran’s central bank.

The United States and its partners have imposed a host of restrictions on banking, shipping, insurance, trade, commodities and a number of government entities. The Belgian-based bank clearing network known as Swift said in February it severed its relations with blacklisted Iranian banks. In January, the EU announced that it would ban imports of Iranian petroleum and its products, freeze the assets of the Iranian central bank, and take additional action against Iran’s energy, financial and transport sectors. Dubai-based Noor Islamic Bank said February 28 it cut off relations with Iranian banks in December.

Cohen cited financial transparency as the key to thwarting Iran’s efforts to evade the sanctions that he said are likely to continue.

Despite those efforts, Iran’s economy has suffered as a result of the economic and financial pressure, according to Cohen. That is reflected most dramatically in its

plummeting currency,” which has lost half of its value since September 2011, he said. Iranian trade has been disrupted to such an extent that, as of late last year, many Iranian banks were experiencing capital shortages.

Korean Nuclear Deal Offers “Modest First Step,” Secretary Clinton Says

29 February 2012

Washington — North Korea’s agreement to implement a moratorium on its uranium enrichment and nuclear activities and allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to verify the suspension is “a modest first step in the right direction,” Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told U.S. lawmakers.

The secretary was speaking February 29 before a hearing of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs.

Clinton reported that North Korea had agreed to implement a moratorium on its long-range missile launches, nuclear tests and nuclear activities at the Yongbyon nuclear facility, including its uranium enrichment activities. In addition, she said it had agreed to allow IAEA inspectors to verify and monitor the moratorium on its Yongbyon uranium enrichment activities and confirm the disablement of its five-megawatt nuclear reactor and associated facilities.

Separately, U.S. and North Korean negotiators also agreed to resolve a long impasse on U.S. food assistance to North Korea by implementing strict verification measures to ensure that the U.S. assistance will reach those most in need of it.

“We ... have agreed to meet with the North to finalize administrative details necessary to move forward with a proposed package of 240,000 metric tons of nutritional assistance, along with the intensive monitoring required for the delivery of such assistance,” Clinton said.

In a February 29 statement, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said delegations from North Korea and the United States had met in Beijing February 23–24 and that a number of points had resulted from their discussions.

During the talks, the United States reaffirmed that it “does not have hostile intent” toward North Korea and that it is prepared to take steps to improve relations “in the spirit of mutual respect for sovereignty and equality.”

The Obama administration is also prepared to take steps to increase people-to-people exchanges with Pyongyang in areas such as culture, education and sports, Nuland said.

The United States also reaffirmed that it is committed to the September 19, 2005, joint statement and its core goal: the verifiable elimination of nuclear programs from the Korean Peninsula.

A senior State Department official who asked not to be identified told reporters in a February 29 conference call that North Korea had agreed to “reversible” steps concerning its nuclear activities, but expressed hope that the deal would begin the process of “walking back” a number of provocative actions it has taken in recent years, including nuclear and ballistic missile tests and attacks on neighboring South Korea.

“This agreement opens the door to serious negotiations to achieve irreversible steps by North Korea toward denuclearization and to meeting their other commitments and international obligations,” the official said.

Talks between North Korea and its partners in the Six-Party Talks — South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the United States — have been on hold since 2009, and the senior official said the United States has repeatedly stated that it is “not interested in talks just for the sake and form of talks.”

President Obama has consistently signaled to North Korea that “we will respond positively if North Korea chooses the path of negotiation, cooperation and denuclearization,” the official said.

“We’ve made it clear to them if they go down the path of peace, engagement and meeting the concerns of the international community, they can have a very different future. They can be lashed up with the international community in a positive way that can be of benefit to them,” the official said.

The official said the Obama administration plans to work with the other members in an effort to “set the stage for real and lasting progress” and determine in advance what will be up for negotiation.

“We need to make sure that we have a winning strategy for not simply sitting down at the table at the Diaoyutai Guesthouse in Beijing, but being able to stand up from the table with something meaningful and something lasting, a process that can deal with the concerns that all of us have with regard to North Korea,” the official said.

VERIFICATIONS TO ENSURE U.S. FOOD AID REACHES THE NEEDIEST

The United States and North Korea have also been discussing the terms under which Washington would provide nutritional assistance to help North Koreans who continue to face chronic food shortages.

The decision to provide humanitarian assistance anywhere in the world is based on three factors: the level of need in a given country, competing needs in other countries and the ability to ensure that aid reliably is reaching people in need. Multiple needs assessments by the U.S. government, the World Food Programme and nongovernmental organizations determined that a targeted nutritional aid program is warranted in North Korea.

A second senior State Department/USAID official said details on the provision of the 240,000 metric tons of aid need to be finalized, but when in place it will be the “most comprehensively monitored and managed program” since U.S. food aid to North Korea began in the mid 1990s.

The official said there would be a regular delivery of about 20,000 tons per month over the period of 12 months of food aid considered appropriate for young children, pregnant women, the elderly and others facing acute malnutrition. The assistance will include a corn-soy blend, vegetable oil, pulses and ready-to-use therapeutic foods designed to meet the specific nutritional needs of these groups.

The official said the United States and North Korean representatives have agreed to meet to finalize the details of the nutritional assistance program.

“There are no plans to delay. We’re ready to go,” the official said.

Secretary Clinton, Congress Begin Debate on Foreign Affairs Budget

29 February 2012

Washington — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is making all the stops in the U.S. Capitol February 28–29 to win congressional support for a foreign affairs budget of more than \$50 billion for the fiscal year that begins October 1.

The lengthy congressional budget process requires that Clinton — and heads of all other Cabinet agencies — appear before committees with oversight of their activities to present their funding priorities, and to receive comment and questions from members of Congress. Over the two days, Clinton has appeared before the appropriations committees of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate, and the committees concerned with international activities in each body.

The Obama administration has presented a \$51.6 billion budget proposal to the Congress to fund all State Department activities around the world, including operations of the embassies, engagement with international and regional organizations and delivery of

humanitarian and development assistance.

Appearing before the House of Representatives Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Activities, Clinton opened her remarks with a sign of incremental diplomatic progress, describing the February 29 announcement of a moratorium on missile launches and nuclear activities to emerge from a round of talks between the United States and North Korea. The unexpected announcement served as an appropriate introduction to Clinton's prepared remarks. "You have seen the world transforming right before your eyes," Clinton said, referring to dramatic political change in the Arab world, the spread of al-Qaida's influence, the disengagement of U.S. troops overseas, and other recent, significant world events. "We are updating diplomacy and development for the 21st century," she said.

The secretary of state outlined the Obama administration's five main priorities for foreign policy in the coming year. Sustaining support for the national security missions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan topped the list. Those costs remain high in relation to many other government programs, but Clinton pointed out that they are on the way down, "\$40 billion less than it was just two years ago."

Strengthening relationships and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region was the next priority cited by Clinton, engaging in "forward-deployed diplomacy" to demonstrate that "America will remain a Pacific power."

The downfall of longstanding regimes and the emergence of new leaders across the Arab world also claim a reserved place on the Obama administration's foreign policy priority list. Supporting the emergence of democratic change and effective institutions with sustained financial investment will be necessary to help these nations become thriving members of the international community, Clinton said. So the Obama administration seeks creation of a specially designated fund of \$770 million to respond to rapid change in the region

"This budget request would also allow us to help the Syrian people survive a brutal assault and plan for a future without Assad," Clinton said. "It continues our assistance for civil society and Arab partners in Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and elsewhere." The secretary reminded the lawmakers of U.S. support for Russia and former Soviet satellite nations as they emerged into a new era in the 1990s, saying the transition in the Arab world is an event of equal historic importance.

"Economic statecraft" was the fourth priority outlined by Clinton, which she described as activity by embassies

worldwide to support U.S. enterprises as they build economic relationships with governments and businesses in other countries.

The placement of development issues on an equal plane with diplomacy and defense was the final priority on the Obama administration list that Clinton presented to the congressional committees. Investments in raising the quality of life in poor nations will serve the United States well in the future, Clinton said. "Through the Global Health Initiative, through our Feed the Future Initiative, we are consolidating programs, increasing our partners' capacity, shifting responsibilities to host countries, and making an impact in areas of health and hunger that will be a real credit to our country going forward."

Clinton made the trip to the U.S. Capitol this week at a time when the nation's budget situation is a huge worry for many Americans, and many lawmakers have pledged to trim annual spending levels and reduce long-term debt. Mindful of those concerns, Clinton told lawmakers that this is not a time for the United States to withdraw from the world. "Investments in American leadership did not cause our fiscal challenges, and retreating from the world will not solve them," she said.

Budget matters have been at the core of some bitter exchanges between Republican and Democratic lawmakers over the years, but that acrimonious tone did not surface during this week's hearings. Though some congresspersons expressed disagreement with Obama administration foreign policy positions, they treated Clinton with respect and gratitude for her service, which since she took office has taken her across 700,000 miles to 95 countries.

Representative Mike Rogers, a Republican lawmaker from Alabama, both complimented and congratulated the U.S. secretary of state. "You've brought a lot of sanity to American foreign policy with your hard work," he said.

U.S. Economy Grew More than Expected in 2011

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 29 February 2012

Washington — The U.S. economy expanded more from October to December 2011 than originally reported, according to a revised estimate from the Commerce Department.

"Real gross domestic product — the output of goods and services produced by labor and property located in the United States — increased at an annual rate of 3.0 percent in the fourth quarter of 2011," the department's Bureau of Economic Analysis said in a February 29 report. The rate of growth was up 0.2 percentage points, or \$7.5 billion, from a January 2012 advance estimate of 2.8 percent for the three-month period. The figure was revised based on

the gathering of more complete data.

The report said the increase in gross domestic product (GDP), the leading indicator of a nation's economic health, reflected positive contributions from private inventory investment, personal consumption expenditures, exports and construction. These gains were partly offset by a drop in federal, state and local government spending as well as by an increase in imports, which are a subtraction in calculating the GDP.

The economy grew at a rate of 1.7 percent for the whole of 2011 after an increase of 3 percent during 2010. The deceleration reflected downturns in private inventory investment and federal government spending and a slowing in export growth. These were partly offset by slowing in import growth and acceleration in business-related construction.

Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke said annual growth for 2011 was low due to slow growth during the first half of the year, but the GDP grew at a rate of more than 2 percent in the second half.

"The limited information available for 2012 is consistent with growth proceeding, in coming quarters, at a pace close to or somewhat above the pace that was registered during the second half of last year," Bernanke testified before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Financial Services February 29.

He said that in a meeting earlier in 2012, the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC), the central bank's policymaking arm, projected growth for the year will fall between 2.2 percent and 2.7 percent. The projection falls considerably below the group's previous forecast for 2012, which they made in June 2011. Bernanke said this drop in expected growth was due to several factors, including continued problems in the U.S. housing market, fiscal strain in Europe and slow global economic growth.

"Looking beyond 2012, FOMC participants expect that economic activity will pick up gradually as these headwinds fade," Bernanke said. He added that the committee will try to maintain low interest rates as it continues to closely monitor the economic climate and adjust policies as necessary to promote the U.S. economic recovery.

USAID Launches New Center to Promote Democracy, Human Rights

29 February 2012

Washington — The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has launched a new center aimed at advancing best practices in democracy, human rights and good governance.

The Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance is part of the agency's reforms and will help ensure that USAID's investments are coordinated with U.S. diplomatic and defense efforts, USAID said in a statement.

The center's objectives include the following:

- Work with USAID missions around the world to collect and compile information about the effectiveness of programs designed to support democracy, human rights and good governance.
- Represent democracy, human rights and governance issues in interagency arenas.
- Manage grants, contracts and funds having to do with democracy, human rights and governance programs.

"This center represents our agency-wide focus on measuring performance to determine what really works," USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah said in remarks at a press conference February 27. "Instead of driving our programming based [on] the conclusions of a handful of experts, we will conduct ongoing, in-depth oral histories, impact evaluations and country assessments to understand where and how we can be most effective."

Shah said that over the next three years, the center will perform more than two dozen detailed evaluations that will for the first time use public opinion surveys in a systematic way to capture data and establish measurable indicators.

"Instead of playing it safe in a field that demands constant innovation," Shah said, "we're going to reward calculated risks and creative approaches — whether that's a mapping platform designed to combat trafficking or procurement reforms that make it easier for us to partner with local civil society organizations."

"And instead of continuing an ineffective program, we'll bring it to an end — and publicly share our experiences so we can all learn," he said.

Shah added: "Development practitioners — myself included — sometimes fall victim to defining human welfare solely in terms of GDP [gross domestic product], hunger or mortality. But we know that progress is defined not solely by the quantifiable, but also by our ability to nurture dignity and advance human potential."

"Around the world every day, our staff is fulfilling this mission with commitment and ingenuity — helping to empower marginalized communities and expand democratic space," he said.

With the center's launch, Shah said, and "a robust new emphasis on evidence-based learning, we can help

advance these efforts, ensuring they are more effective, cost-efficient and results-oriented than ever before."

The center will be housed in USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance.

USAID is an independent agency that provides economic, development and humanitarian assistance around the world in support of the foreign policy goals of the United States.

Syrians Facing "Murder and Starvation," Says State's Brimmer

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 28 February 2012

Washington — A senior U.S. official says all nations should "heed the call of conscience" in response to the Syrian government's continued brutal suppression of its people, and should halt all support for Bashar al-Assad's regime, including arms or material transfers and financial support.

Speaking at an urgent debate of the U.N. Human Rights Council in Geneva February 28, Esther Brimmer, the assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs, also urged the international community to back former U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's efforts as the newly appointed U.N.-Arab League joint special envoy to Syria, and to support a plan put forward by the Arab League and endorsed by the U.N. General Assembly to end the violence.

"Syrian women, men and children face murder and starvation at the hands of their own government, simply because they demand respect for the universal human rights this Council exists to protect and advance," Brimmer told the session.

"Let our nations demonstrate today that the world stands united with the people of Syria, for it is they who represent their country's future, just as Assad and his murderous cohort represent its past," she said.

The Council's urgent debate was requested by Turkey, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. According to press reports, the four countries have drafted a resolution condemning Syria's "continued widespread and systematic violations," including using heavy artillery and tanks to attack residential areas. The text reportedly expresses concern at the lack of food, medicine and fuel in some areas, with a call for the Assad regime to allow relief agencies to deliver aid supplies to civilians, particularly in Homs, Deraa and Zabadani, which have been targeted by Syrian security forces.

Brimmer said that, by deliberately bombarding populated cities and towns, the Assad regime has escalated its

"outrageous and ongoing crimes" against its people. She said that unless the killing stops and immediate humanitarian access is guaranteed, "this despicable government will murder many more before this heinous chapter in Syria's history is over."

On February 4, the U.N. Security Council failed to adopt a resolution backing the Arab League's proposals for an end to the violence, for the release of political prisoners, and for Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad to delegate power to his vice president and allow the creation of a national government of unity.

Brimmer said that although 13 members of the Security Council voted in support of the Arab League's plan, "indefensible vetoes by two permanent members gave Assad cover to accelerate his war on the Syrian people," referring to Russia and China.

"Bashar al-Assad must go. There must be a Syrian-led democratic political transition that meets the long-suppressed aspirations of the Syrian people," she said.

U.N. human rights chief Navi Pillay told the Human Rights Council that the situation inside Syria is "dire," and that the Assad regime needs to declare an "immediate humanitarian cease-fire," according to press reports.

Pillay called for the situation in the country to be referred to the International Criminal Court, which has the authority to prosecute senior Syrian officials for alleged human rights violations and atrocities.

According to Pillay, around 500 Syrian children have been killed since protests against the Assad regime began in March 2011, and 80 of those killings took place in January. Pillay noted that the human rights situation in the country "has deteriorated significantly since November 2011."

The Assad government "has manifestly failed in its responsibility to protect the population; its forces have committed widespread, systematic and gross human rights violations, amounting to crimes against humanity, with the apparent knowledge and consent of the highest levels of the state," Pillay said.

Global Drug Panel Urges Action Before "Tipping Point" Comes

By Charlene Porter | Staff Writer | 28 February 2012

Washington — Communities the world over, rich and poor, must take action to address the "vicious cycle" of drug abuse and drug trafficking before problems spiral out of control, according to an international assessment of drug activity issued by a panel based in Vienna.

"It is crucial that the needs of communities experiencing social disintegration are urgently tackled before the tipping point is reached, beyond which effective action becomes impossible," said Hamid Ghodse, the president of the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB), upon release of the panel's annual report February 28.

The INCB is an independent body monitoring the implementation of the United Nations' international drug-control conventions. The panel monitors the distribution and availability of legal drugs for medical and scientific use. It also monitors the manufacture and trafficking of illegal drugs and national and international systems to control them. The INCB is responsible for monitoring international adherence to the U.N. conventions and helping nations comply with them.

The press summary of the report notes that rampant drug activity can threaten social cohesion with a variety of adverse economic, political and cultural consequences. The panel places a special emphasis on how community youth will suffer if these forces are let loose.

"Youth of these communities must have similar chances to those in the wider society," Ghodse said, "and have a right to be protected from drug abuse and drug dependence."

INCB recommends that communities pursue a number of actions, such as drug-abuse prevention, treatment and rehabilitation services; increasing youth opportunities in endangered communities; and promotion of positive role models to counter the perception of affluence among drug criminals.

The expanding abuse of what are sometimes called "date-rape" drugs is a worrisome trend, the panel says. These are psychoactive substances, colorless and odorless, that sexual predators will covertly administer to victims in bars or airport lounges with the intent of inebriating and assaulting the victims in what the panel calls drug-facilitated crime. INCB reports that young people are being forced into prostitution with the use of these illicit substances, and is urging governments to respond to the threats and "to take measures to ensure that forensic proof is obtained whenever a drug-facilitated crime is suspected."

INCB also calls on governments to take action against illegal Internet pharmacies that are using 21st-century technologies to peddle both illicit and prescription drugs. Illegal pharmacies have been on the INCB's radar for years, but now these sites are using social media in their marketing campaigns, creating yet another threat to vulnerable young people. The dangers of illegal pharmacies are many, says the board. They issue drugs without prescriptions, violating drug control standards;

the drugs may not be properly manufactured, and could be useless or toxic; and patients don't receive adequate supervision in use of these drugs. The INCB quotes a World Health Organization finding that more than half the drugs distributed through such pharmacies are counterfeit.

In 2008, the INCB issued guidelines for governments to prevent the illegal sale of pharmaceuticals, but the 2012 report says further progress must be made to implement the protections. The panel also recommends international cooperation in efforts to identify and close these operations.

The annual INCB report was issued with a historical footnote marking the 100th anniversary of the first international drug control treaty, the International Opium Convention of The Hague in 1912. The INCB says that treaty was the first expression of the international principle of shared responsibility for drug control for the health and safety of people everywhere.

Finance Ministers Focus on Strengthening Global Economy

By MacKenzie C. Babb | Staff Writer | 27 February 2012

Washington — The Group of 20 advanced economies have worked together to diminish risks to the global economy, but still face significant economic challenges to full recovery, according to U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner.

"Our focus now is on reforms that will help create a stronger foundation for future growth and broaden economic opportunity," he said. "Our strategy is to combine investments and reforms in education, innovation and infrastructure with tax reforms and savings to restore long-term fiscal sustainability."

The secretary spoke February 26 at the G20 meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors in Mexico City. He commended "encouraging signs of resilience" in economies around the world. Talks at the February 25-26 meeting focused on three key issues: Europe and the economic outlook, global financial reform, and Iran and oil markets.

On Europe, Geithner said the group was encouraged by recent progress on the region's path to financial recovery.

Mexican President Felipe Calderón, who spoke to the ministers February 25, also praised European leaders for implementing new reforms to enable countries in the region to reduce their deficits.

"I am pleased to see that the Euro zone countries are gradually coming up with the required solutions" to

strengthen the European economic recovery, he said. "We know that much remains to be done, but these are obviously steps in the right direction."

Geithner said that beyond Europe, steps that many emerging economies have taken during the past several months have helped to support the global economic recovery. He encouraged countries to continue to enact policies to reinforce economic expansion and domestic sources of growth.

On Iran and oil, Geithner said he had a "series of encouraging conversations with countries planning to significantly reduce imports from Iran." He said the G20 partners are cooperating effectively to ensure that banks around the world "cease transactions with the Central Bank of Iran and that Iranian banks find it harder than ever to facilitate Iran's illicit nuclear activities or to help Iran evade sanctions."

The secretary said he was also encouraged by the group's cooperation to ensure alternative sources of oil from major producers to help offset reductions in exports from Iran.

Regarding financial reform, Geithner said the group reviewed the global effort to strengthen safeguards against future risks in the financial system. He said they made important progress on tougher capital standards, discussed strategies for oversight and transparency, and shared information on how to manage financial crises.

The finance ministers' meeting followed a meeting of the G20 foreign ministers in Los Cabos, Mexico, a week earlier. Both meetings came in preparation for the group's annual leaders' summit in Los Cabos in June.

Paying the Ultimate Price for the Freedom of Information

By Stephen Kaufman | Staff Writer | 24 February 2012

Washington — American journalist Marie Colvin had already had her brush with death in Sri Lanka when a rocket-propelled grenade took out her left eye in 2001. Two years before that, she refused to abandon a group of refugees in East Timor who were under threat from a militia group, and her decision to stay most likely saved their lives.

Colvin and French photographer Remi Ochlik were killed February 22 when a Syrian military shell hit their makeshift media center in Homs. It was another reminder to the world that real people sometimes pay the ultimate price to provide information that governments, corporations, security forces, gangs, thugs and others would prefer to remain unknown.

Journalism has been described as the first draft of history. Its first core principle, according to the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics, is to "seek truth and report it." For some, seeking and reporting the truth, even if it will only appear as a two-minute segment on the evening news or a small column in the back pages of a newspaper, has become a principle they will risk everything for.

According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 43 journalists were killed around the world in 2011 in incidents directly related to their work. The organization reported that of those killed, 15 percent had died due to being caught in the crossfire of a combat situation, 39 percent were on a dangerous assignment, and 46 percent had been deliberately murdered.

Some of the names of those killed because of their quest for the truth have become famous. In 2002 Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl was kidnapped and murdered in Pakistan after being lured from his apartment by terrorists who had promised him an interview with a prominent Muslim cleric. Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who had written many pieces critical of the Russian government's actions in Chechnya, was shot dead in 2006 outside her Moscow apartment in what is widely believed to have been a politically motivated contract killing.

The mortality statistics stand alongside the fact that in 2011 the number of journalists imprisoned worldwide rose more than 20 percent to 179 writers, editors and photojournalists — the highest level of incarceration since the mid-1990s, according to CPJ. Much of the rise was in the Middle East and North Africa; CPJ describes Iran as "the world's worst jailer," with 42 journalists behind bars.

In a 2009 interview, Zimbabwean journalist Peta Thornycroft tried to explain why, after more than 35 years of intimidation, hiding her identity and living out of suitcases, plus serving time in jail, she continues to put herself in danger.

"I don't know how to do anything else," she said. "I can't rush off and be an electrician or do something else."

But she acknowledged that the work is grueling. It involves living under constant threat of arrest and harassment, as well as trying to identify sources and keep their identities safe from discovery by the authorities.

In 2007, Thornycroft was given a lifetime achievement award by the Washington-based International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), but her frustration and sadness at the lack of change in Zimbabwe, as well as her own sense of helplessness, was obvious at the awards ceremony.

"I don't think I make any difference. I'm sorry about that," she said at the event. "I'm constantly hacking on about the appalling way people are treated, the appalling abuses in the police cells. ... [But] the government seems to be completely impervious to the suffering that they have to be able to see. ... They are just wasting away this clever, talented nation."

"I just carry on because it's there and it's a story that has to be told," she said. "I don't really know any other kind of life."

The bravery of these men and women, from bloggers to videographers, preserves a very basic and fundamental freedom: that all people have the right to free and open access to information. Their willingness to take risks brings valuable insight into what is really happening inside countries like Syria, whose government continues to deny free access to international human rights observers as well as journalists.

President Obama described journalists and bloggers as "the frontlines against tyranny and oppression" when he signed the Freedom of the Press Act in May 2010. Recalling the murder of Daniel Pearl, the president said that incident "reminded us of how valuable a free press is, and it reminded us that there are those who would go to any length in order to silence journalists around the world."

Listening to accounts from their colleagues in the press, it seems likely that Marie Colvin, Remi Ochlik, and the many others who have been killed doing their job were fully aware of the risks.

"I have been in several situations where I have said my last prayer, for certainty that I was going to be killed," one journalist from McClatchy News' Baghdad bureau said at the 2007 IWMMF awards dinner. "It was on the way to work, on the way back from work — terrifying situations are in our path every day. We have learned to live with that fear. Otherwise we would sit in our homes, close our doors, and even then we're not safe," she said.

At the 2008 awards, CBS News' Kimberly Dozier, who was injured by a roadside bomb while reporting from Iraq in 2006, said some of her colleagues "live in the fire."

Honoring the IWMMF awardees, Dozier said, "Every time you walk outside the door, every time you ask a question, you are challenging your culture, you are challenging your government, and you are risking your lives."

(This is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov>)